Speirs Lock Regeneration & Garscube Landscape Link

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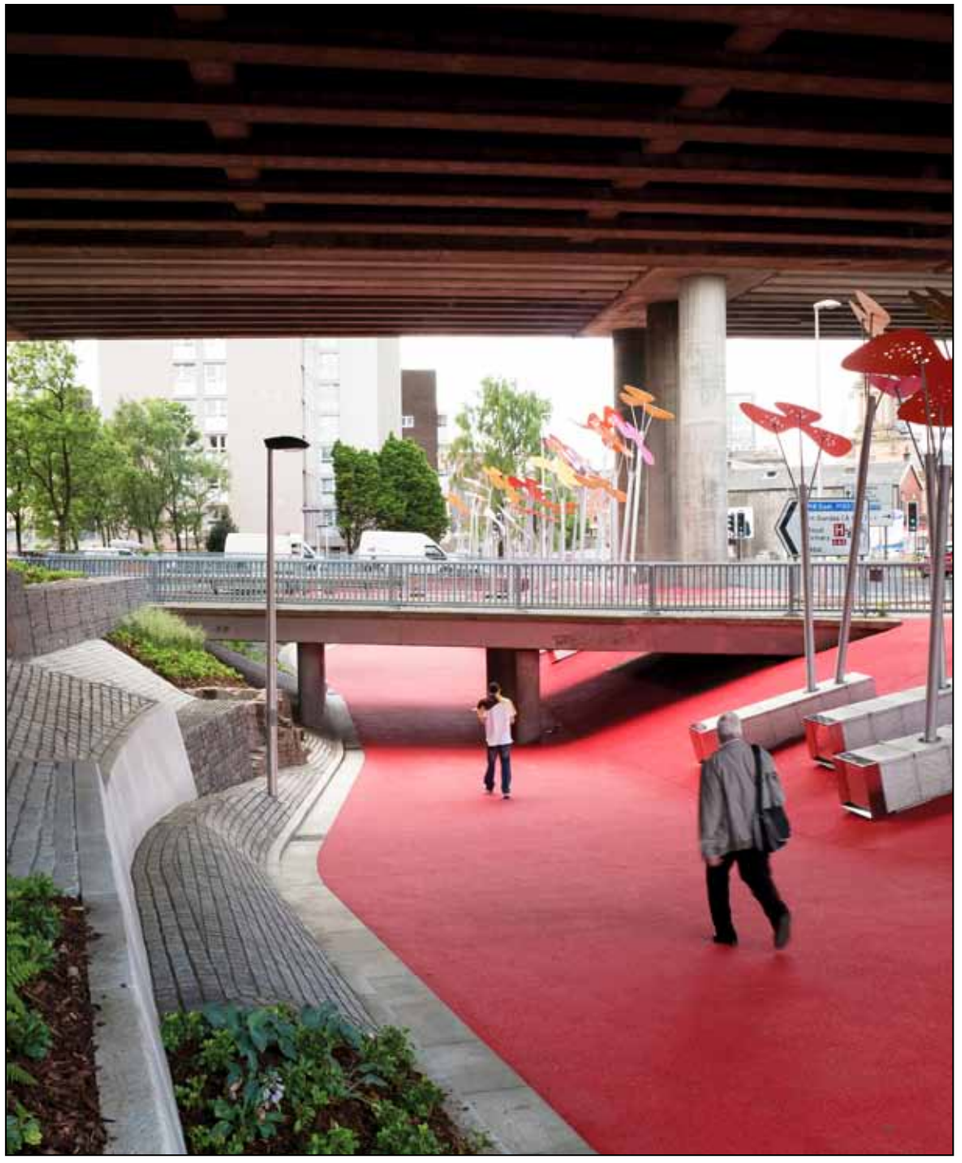

In 2008 rankinfraser landscape architecture were appointed by the Glasgow Canal Regeneration Partnership to work with Make Architects (7N Architects) and artists Koan3 to envisage the transformation of Speirs Lock, 14 hectares of low grade industrial and derelict land adjacent to the Glasgow branch of the Forth and Clyde Canal. Chris Rankin and Kenny Fraser, the partners in rankinfraser are both lecturers in ESALA at the University of Edinburgh. The regeneration strategy which emerged after thorough research over ten months into the challenges and opportunities for the area was entitled 'Growing the Place'. The innovative approach developed during the research recognised that long term sustainable regeneration would only be possible if the existing negative perceptions of the place could be overturned. The research led to the conclusion that overturning the poor image of the area involved instigating catalyst projects which would either build on the remaining areas of positive historic or environmental character, or improve the physical connections between the area and Glasgow city centre. The most significant catalyst project to emerge from this approach was the Garscube Landscape Link.

project

Speirs Lock Regeneration & Garscube Landscape Link

output 01

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project introduction

Project Description

Growing the Place - Speirs Lock Regeneration
The Speirs Lock regeneration initiative was instigated by the Glasgow Canal Regeneration Partnership (GCRP), a partnership between Glasgow City Council and ISIS Waterside Regeneration, supported by British Waterways Scotland. The specific problem the research was asked to address can be found in many cities with a legacy of 1960's and 70's urbanism and infrastructure and a redundant pre-industrial infrastructure. The construction of the M8 motorway in the 1960's and the increasing obsolescence of the Forth and Clyde Canal accelerated the decline of the once thriving trading centre of Speirs Locks. The GCRP initiated the masterplan project to signal the wider transformation of the Speirs Locks area which had degenerated to comprise 14 hectares of low grade industrial and derelict land. The masterplan was intended to unlock the development opportunities of the site.

The design team including rankinfraser was chosen after a rigorous selection process which included; an initial expression of interest, an ideas design competition, a public presentation and a final interview.

The research initially recognised that, at the beginning of 2008 and the global recession, a traditional development lead approach with a focus on developer interest and investment would not be a sustainable way in which to regenerate the area. An alternative approach which focused on building on the positive qualities of what was there, improving connections between the canal and the city centre and overturning negative impressions through short and medium term transformative environmental projects was adopted. Following a rigorous research process which included a detailed mapping of the site, both its positive and negative qualities and engagement with local residents, businesses and stakeholders the strategy called "Growing the Place" evolved. The resultant approach focussed on opening up the area through new links and connections from the city centre to the Forth and Clyde Canal whilst cultivating the idea of a cultural quarter through instigation of high profile arts and public realm initiatives. This would encourage people to rediscover the area which would, in turn, drive the next stage of regeneration. This approach is at the heart of the significance and originality of the research. The approach develops a continuing thread of rankinfraser's design research where a focus on the detailed understanding of the existing qualities of a place; be they spatial, historical, ecological or emotional is the stimulus for regeneration of a place and the driver for design invention.
The research's impact and significance has been recognised by the Scottish Government through its selection as an exemplar project for the Scottish Sustainable Communities Initiative (SSCI). The SSCI was launched in June 2008 to encourage the creation of places, designed and built to last, where a high quality of life can be achieved. Eleven projects were selected from an initial list of sixty eight. The initiative is about creating places which are ambitious and inspiring, raising standards and developing skills in design, architecture and sustainable construction. These exemplar projects have been selected as best capable of demonstrating how sustainable communities can be delivered. (see also page 07).
A more traditional masterplan was also produced in parallel to Growing the Place to illustrate how the area might ultimately evolve. This approach was still guided by the principles of responding to the character and identity of the place however. One example of this was the development of key view corridors which limited the height of development in certain areas in order that key visual connections between the canal corridor and distant city landmarks were maintained. (see also page 06)

Awards
The research has been recognised with various national award wins and commendations including winning a British Urban Regeneration Award in 2009 for Strategy and Masterplanning. The judges' citation states; "*The project illustrates the effectiveness of delivery by the joint venture vehicle. It demonstrates best practice in terms of the community and stakeholder engagement process, to produce a framework consistent with the sustainability charter. It makes excellent use of design guidelines and the design process. The significance of the submission is not simply in the masterplan itself but the approach being taken which successfully integrates and sets best practice in all of the elements that are required to deliver transformational and sustainable regeneration.*"
It was also commended at the Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning 2009 in the Community Involvement Category. The judges commented; "*the project is a great example of how disconnected and under used urban areas can be reinvigorated through a multi-agency approach with strong leadership and a pragmatic approach to development. The project has a clear development plan basis and is realising its objectives*."
Publications
The research was published in 'Urban Design Magazine', Issue 114, spring 2010 and 'Prospect Magazine', spring 2009.(this magazine has now re-branded as Urban Realm it is not the political magazine of the same name).
Exhibitions
The Scottish Sustainable Communities Exhibition in The Lighthouse, Glasgow, May 2009.

The research was initiated in 2008 and was completed in 2009.

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project introduction

Garscube Landscape Link

The key requirement of the Speirs Lock regeneration strategy mentioned above was that it should act as a catalyst for economic and social regeneration and re-establish the area as a landmark location. The research led to a strategy which enabled this once thriving but now anonymous place to be re-discovered.

One of the first catalyst projects which emerged out of the Growing the Place strategy was the transformation of the Garscube Underpass, a typical 'non-place'. Mark Auge defines non-places as spaces which cannot be defined as relational or historical or concerned with identity. (Marc Auge; Non-Places, Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity; Verso; London; 1995). As is common in many cities where regional road infrastructure cuts through the city centre, the construction of the M8 motorway had a detrimental impact on the cohesiveness of the urban grain in Glasgow with the network of local urban places, streets, parks and squares adjacent to the motorway transformed into non-places. Communities were severed from each other and the city centre.

The project brief called for the radical revitalization of this crucial connection between Speirs Lock, the canal network and Glasgow city centre. Seen in a wider context the research question was how to humanize the legacy of 1960's modernist urbanism in an imaginative and sympathetic way and create catalyst for the regeneration of an urban quarter.

The research method was developed from the Growing the Place strategy but at a more site specific scale. A detailed mapping of the underpass was undertaken. This included mapping both the existing spatial condition and mapping the history of the site in its city context. The results of this detailed mapping and recording of the identity of the place included the discovery that prior to the construction of the motorway and underpass the site had been a small neighborhood park called Phoenix Park and prior to that; an ironworks. Other results included the extent of accumulated clutter in the space which contributed to its claustrophobic character, the impressive 'cathedral like' scale of the motorway architecture and presence of existing geological outcrops. The design approach which emerged from the research was driven by these discoveries; most directly the memory of the park and the need to un-clutter the space and respond to the monumental scale of the overhead motorway.

The design widens the underpass considerably with a flowing and unifying surface that doesn't constrain those using it to a single confrontational route. This surface also unifies the two sides of the space which were given different treatments according to the character derived from the initial mapping. The surface wraps up the west side and is illuminated by a ribbon of 50 coloured aluminium "flowers" which draw the visitor through the space. The 'flowers' are designed in deliberate contrast to the solidity of the concrete motorway structure and are a reference to Phoenix Park. The east side of the underpass consists of a more contextually driven and humanizing series of planted terraces formed by gabion baskets with stone reclaimed from the site demolition works which are partly clad in corten steel. Areas of the uncovered bed rock were retained and incorporated; and a rain water collection system feeds water to the plants shaded by the overhead carriageways.

The research's significance to the client, the profession of Landscape Architecture, the public and the environment can be explained as follows; The project was the first completed phase of the Speirs Lock regeneration initiative and was directly responsible for stimulating interest and attracting new investment to the area. Brian McGraw, Had of Development and Regeneration Services at Glasgow City Council stated in 2012, '*rankinfraser's work on the Phoenix Flowers ... has been a major success levering in many times the £1.4m investment in the flowers into the new Cultural campus area. At last count approaching £16m and I'm sure is set to reach circa £20m within a couple of years."* Examples of this investment include nationally important arts organizations such as the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and the National Theatre moving into the Speirs Locks masterplan site. In terms of the public and the environment it heals an infrastructural scar created by the construction of the M8. It exemplifies sustainability in the truest sense, it has a powerful and poetic concept which harks back to the memory of the site prior to the motorway's construction but is unashamedly contemporary.

The research is significant in that it establishes a model for addressing a problem found in many cities; the creation a place from a non-place which was the legacy of 1960's modernist urbanism. A non-place where previously one rushed through or avoided, has become a place to linger with a recognisable identity. It indicates how a landscape led scheme can deliver true social and economic benefits for the wider community. It indicates how Landscape Architects can deliver value from the most exceptionally hostile contexts. Two further demanding problems which were solved was the 'Phoenix Flowers' lighting solution, a deliberately 'loud' intervention which competes with the scale and visual cacophony of the fly over environment while a rain water collection system feeds water to the plants shaded by the overhead carriageways of the motorway.

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Timescale
The research and design was initiated in late 2008 and was completed in June 2010.

Awards
The research's impact has been recognised with various national award wins including being awarded a Special Mention Award at the RIAS (Royal Incorporation of Architects Scotland) Andrew Doolan Best Building in Scotland Awards 2011 (Judges; Professor Andy MacMillan OBE FRIAS (Chair), Sholto Humphries President RIAS and Architect David Mackay Hon FRIAS) where the citation states, '*this highly unusual work of architecture enlivens a previously unpleasant public space and infuses it with joy*.'

Other awards for the design include;
Scottish Design Awards 2010, Future Building Category – Winner;
Roses Design Awards 2010, Placemaking/ Landscaping – Gold Award Winner;
BALI (British Association of Landscape Industries) Principal Winner, Hard Landscaping Construction, Cost between £300,000 - £1,500,000 2011 and Principal Winner for Best Innovation/ Technology used in a Landscape Scheme in 2011.
The judges citation states; '*Gabions containing porphory have been used to excellent effect and crushed stone from site re-used wherever possible. A large stone outcrop has been integrated into the scheme, which is softened by creative planting. The imaginative and clever use of a range of landscape techniques has delivered an absolutely stunning piece of sculptural engineering*.'

Publications
Other discernible research impacts include being selected by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) as a Case Study for the RIBA Sustainability Hub Website. The Sustainability Hub is a publicly accessible web site which disseminates information on sustainability to professionals, educators and students.

www.architecture.com/SustainabilityHub/Casestudies/4-GarscubeLandscapeLink.aspx

The research has featured in the 2013 Scottish Government policy on architecture "CREATING PLACES, A policy on architecture and place for Scotland' p3 and p26.

www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0042/00425496.pdf

The research has been selected for publication in international books and journals.

Books
'Urban Spaces', Chris van Uffelen, Braun Publishers, Switzerland, 2013 p 258-259
'Going Public, Public Architecture, Urbanism and Interventions', Gestalten, Berlin, 2012. p 185
'1000 tips for Landscape Architects', Daniela Santos Quartino, Loft Publications, 2011 pp 222-223

Journals
A&B *Architektura & Biznes*, 05/11 pp 70 - 71
'Paisea Landscape Architecture Review' nr 16 'Scars' March 2011 pp 040 - 043

Exhibitions
It was selected for the Annual Exhibition at The Royal Scottish Academy in 2009 and was part of the Architecture + Design Scotland organised RIAS Andrew Doolan Best Building in Scotland Exhibition at The Lighthouse from 30/11/11 until 09/01/12 and subsequently touring.

The research has been widely published on architecture websites including;

http://sustainablecitiescollective.com/futurecapetown/169291/spaces-below-freeways-and-highways-people
http://www.landezine.com/index.php/2010/09/garscube-landscape-link
http://www.plataformaarquitectura.cl/2010/07/18/garscube-link-7n-architects-rankinfraser/
http://www.urbanrealm.co.uk/news/2480/Phoenix_Flowers_bed_down_at_Garscube_Link.html
http://www.contemporist.com/2010/07/16/phoenix-flowers-by-rankinfraser-and-7n-architects/
http://www.archdaily.com/69178/garscube-landscape-link-7n-architects-rankinfraser-landscape-architecture/
http://www.mimoa.eu/projects/United%20Kingdom/Glasgow/Garscube%20Link
http://www.fastcodesign.com/1661922/how-to-revitalize-a-highway-underpass-hint-turn-it-into-munchkinland

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fig 1
Example of short term transformative project - annual wildflower meadow.

fig 2
Visual of proposed physical connection to Forth and Clyde Canal.

fig 3
Traditional masterplan for the area.

figure 1

figure 2

figure 3

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fig 4
Study of visual corridors to key city landmarks. View corridors were defined to maintain visual links to the wider landscape context

fig 5
Definition of areas where high rise is possible. High rise development was only allowed in the zones between the view corridors.

fig 6
3D study exploring the relationship of view corridors to built form.

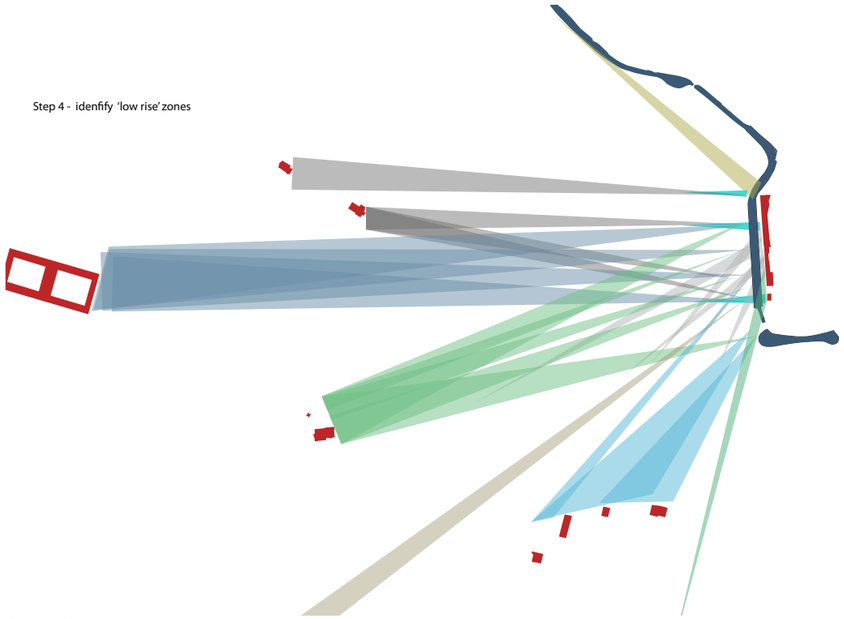

figure 4

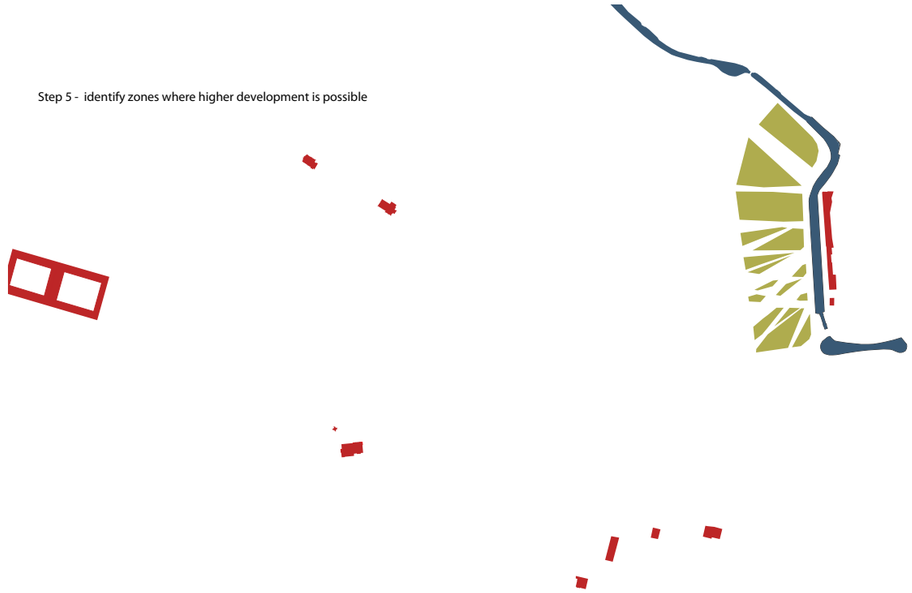

figure 5

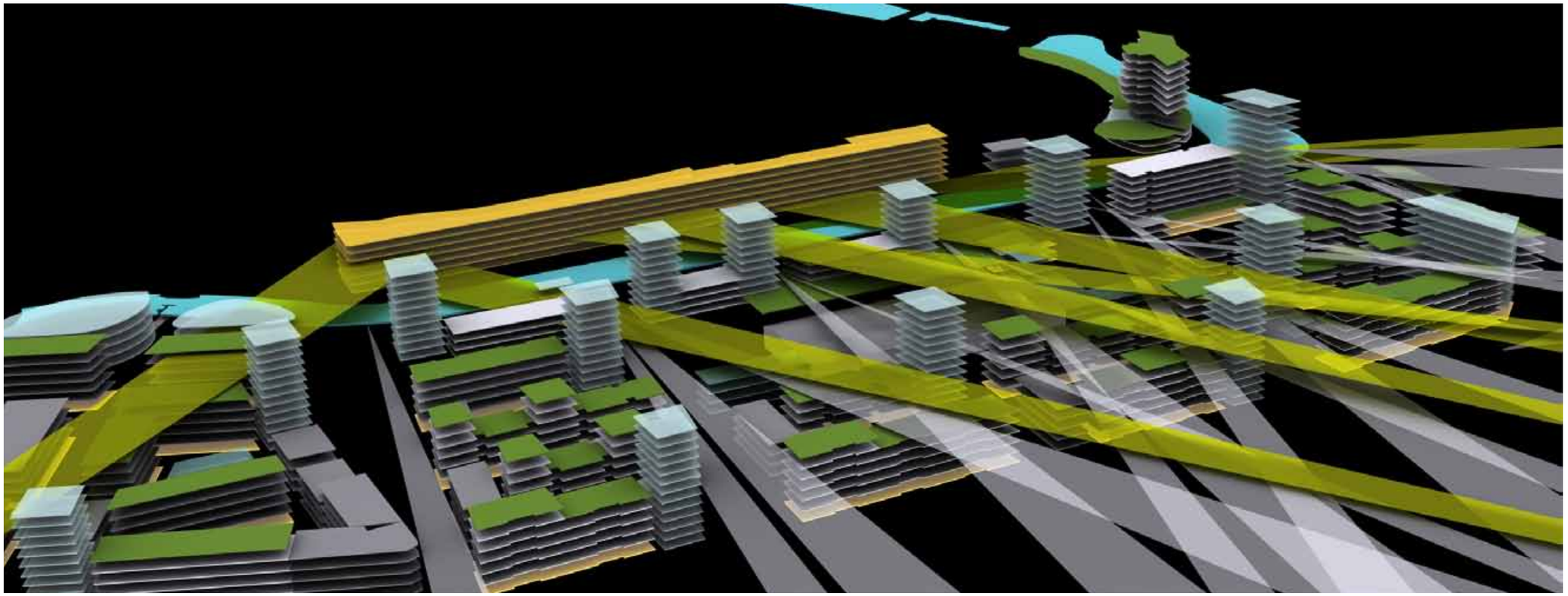

figure 6

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fig 7
Extract from SSCI website The Scottish Government initiative to select and publicise best practice examples of sustainable place making. www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/AandP/Projects/SSCI.

fig 8
Extract from SSCI website on Speirs Lock.

fig 9
Extract from SSCI website on Garscube Landscape Link.

fig 10
Extract from the Scottish Government's 2013 policy 'CREATING PLACES, A policy on architecture and place for Scotland'.

fig 11
Extract from RIBA Sustainability hub website. The Sustainability Hub was been set up by the RIBA in order to provide a central resource on all aspects of sustainable design in architecture. The Garscube project was selected as a case study. Case studies have a specific purpose: to highlight how individual sustainable design strategies were incorporated with a focus is on the design process.

figure 7

figure 8

figure 9

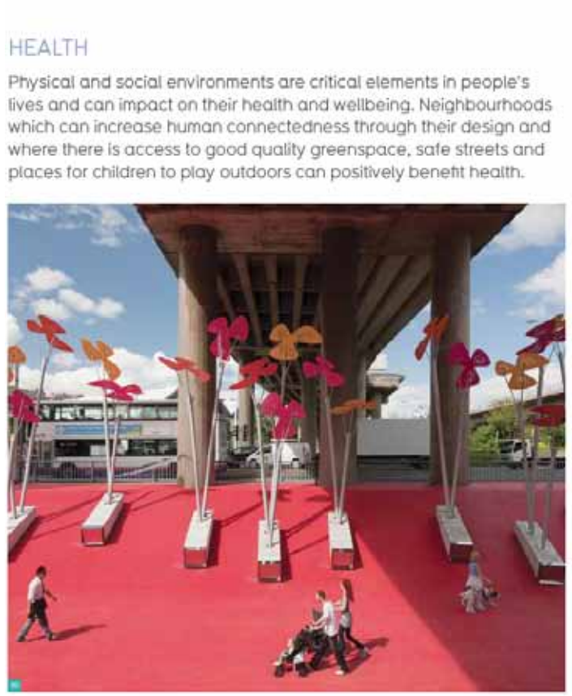

figure 10

figure 11

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fig 11
Garscube Underpass before, indicating the claustrophobic nature of the site.

fig 12
Garscube Underpass before, indicating the chaotic urban environment.

fig 13
Location of the Garscube Landscape Link imposed over an aerial photograph illustrating the demolition of the city centre undertaken to build the M8 motorway.

figure 11

figure 12

figure 13

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fig 14
View of completed project.

fig 15
View of completed project showing exposed bedrock outcrop.

fig 16
View of completed project at night.

(all photos Dave Morris)

figure 14

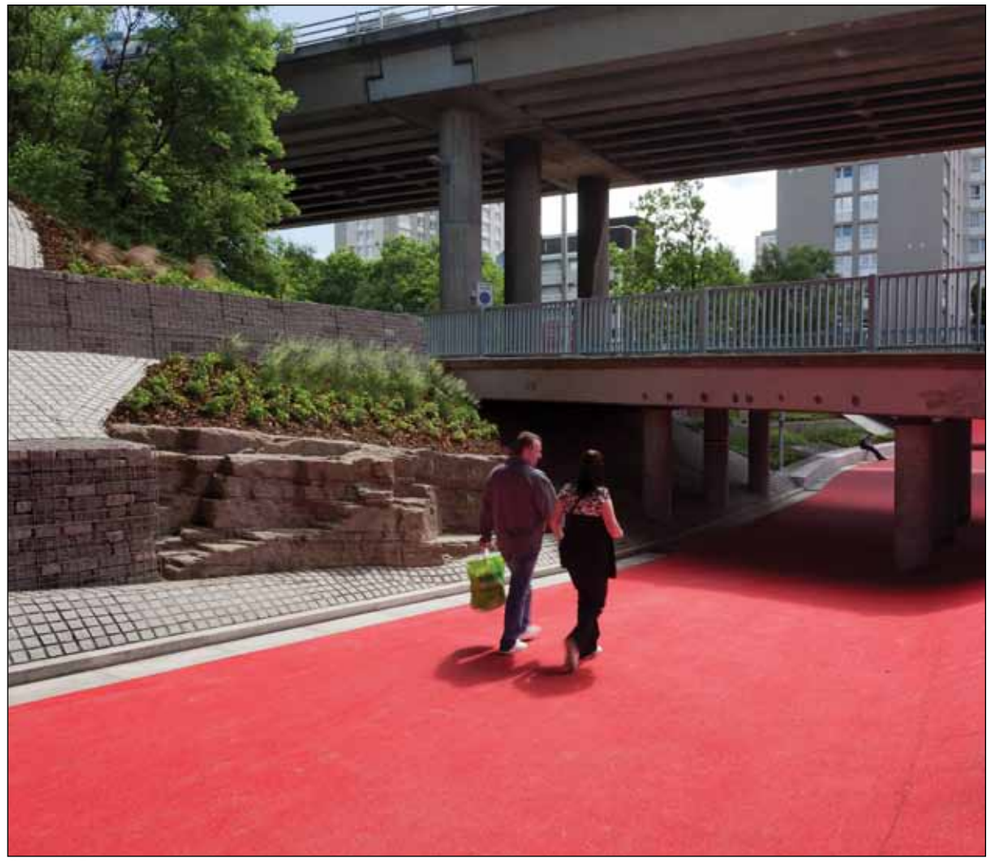

figure 15

figure 16

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